

## **Progress And The Work Ahead In Iraq**

**Today, President Bush Addressed Members Of The Veterans Of Foreign Wars On Progress On Our Strategy For Victory In Iraq.** The President discussed the political, security, and economic elements of the strategy for victory in the central front of the War on Terror, what has been achieved, the challenges faced at the start of 2006, and what the American people can expect to see in the year ahead.

### **The Political Component Of Victory In Iraq:**

**In The Past 12 Months, Iraq Has Undergone A Political Transformation That Is Virtually Without Precedent.** Iraqis have completed three successful nationwide elections, voted for a transitional government, drafted the most progressive, democratic constitution in the Arab world, approved that constitution, and elected a new government under their new constitution. Each successive election has seen less violence, bigger turnout, and broader participation than the one before.

- **The Process Of Forming A New National Government Will Take Time And Patience.** When the final election results come in, Iraqi leaders will begin working to form a new government. In the weeks ahead, Americans will likely see political turmoil in Iraq – as different factions and leaders compete for position and jockey for power. Yet out of this debate will emerge a free government that represents the will of the Iraqi people.

**Iraqis Have Shown They Can Come Together For The Sake Of National Unity.** After the January 2005 elections, Shia and Kurdish leaders who did well at the polls reached out to Sunni Arabs who failed to participate. Now Iraqis must reach out once again across political, religious, and sectarian lines and form a government of national unity. In the December 2005 elections, Sunnis turned out in large numbers. Sunnis who abandoned violence to join the political process must learn to use their influence to benefit their community and the country at large. Shia and Kurds need to understand that successful free societies protect minority rights. The success of Iraqi democracy will come when political divisions are driven not by sectarian rivalries but by ideas, convictions, and a common vision for the future.

**Iraq's New Leaders Will Face Tough Decisions.** When a government assumes office, Iraq's new leaders will face tough decisions on issues such as security, reconstruction, and economic reform, and they will have to review and possibly amend the constitution. If amendments are approved, these changes will be once again taken to the Iraqi people for approval in a referendum before year's end. During this transition, America and our Coalition partners will continue to help Iraqis build an impartial system of justice, combat corruption by strengthening the Commission on Public Integrity, and build effective government ministries. As Iraq's leaders take these steps to build a strong democracy, foreign terrorists and Saddamists will continue to fight this progress. Yet with the recent elections, the enemies of a free Iraq have suffered a real defeat, and the Saddamists and rejectionists are increasingly marginalized. The terrorists and regime loyalists are no match for millions of Iraqis determined to live in liberty.

### **The Security Component Of Victory In Iraq:**

**America And Its Coalition Partners Are Helping Iraqis Defend Their Democracy By Training Iraqi Security Forces.**

Last November, the President described many of the changes made over the past year to improve the training of the Iraqi army and police, and the fruits of those changes were seen during the December elections. Iraqi forces took the lead in election security – protecting over 6,000 polling centers, disrupting attacks, and maintaining order. Due in large part to their courage and skill, the number of attacks during the elections declined dramatically compared with the January vote.

- **Iraqi Security Forces Are Growing In Size And Strength.** As Iraqis see their own countrymen defending them against the terrorists and Saddamists, they are stepping forward with needed intelligence. General Casey reports that the number of tips from Iraqis has grown from 400 in March 2005 to over 4,700 last month.

**In 2006, The Coalition Will Focus Efforts On Improving The Performance Of Iraqi Police.** Iraqi Army and police are increasingly able to take the lead in the fight, yet the Iraqi police still lag behind the Army in training and capabilities. One of

the major goals in 2006 is to accelerate Iraqi police training and improve the performance of the Ministry of Interior's Special Police, the border police, and the local station police.

- **The Coalition Will Work To Improve The Interior Ministry's Special Police.** The Interior Ministry's Special Police are the most capable Iraqi police force, and about 19,000 trained and equipped – near our goal for a complete force. Many are professional and diverse, but recently some have been accused of committing abuses against Iraqi civilians. To stop abuses and increase professionalism, the Coalition is working with the Iraqi government to make adjustments in the way these forces are trained. Human rights and rule of law training is being increased. A new Police Ethics and Leadership Institute is being established in Baghdad. To improve capabilities, Iraqi Special Police battalions will be partnered with Coalition battalions so that American forces can work with and train their Iraqi counterparts.
- **The Coalition Is Helping To Increase The Border Police To Defend Iraq's Frontiers And Stop Foreign Terrorists From Crossing Into The Country.** Manning entrances by land, sea, and air ports across the country, Iraq now has 18,000 border police on the job, with the goal of 28,000 trained and equipped by the end of 2006. To better train border police, a new customs academy in Basra has been established, and the Coalition is embedding border police transition teams with Iraqi units, made up of Coalition soldiers and assisted by Department of Homeland Security experts. Iraqi border forces are growing increasingly capable and taking on more responsibility. In November, these forces took the lead in protecting Iraq's Syrian border. The Coalition expects to hand over primary responsibility for all of Iraq's borders to Iraqi border police later this year.
- **The Coalition Is Helping Iraqis Increase The Size And Capabilities Of The Local Station Police.** These local Iraqi police forces need the most work. There are now over 80,000 local police officers across Iraq – a little more than halfway toward the goal of 135,000. To improve the capabilities of these local police, the Coalition is partnering local Iraqi police units with teams of U.S. military police and international police liaison officers, including retired U.S. police officers. These officers will work with provincial police chiefs and focus on improving local police forces in nine key cities that have seen intense fighting with the terrorists – Baghdad, Baquba, Fallujah, Kirkuk, Mosul, Najaf, Ramadi, Samarra, and Tal Afar.

**As More Iraqi Forces Come On Line, The Coalition Will Focus On Preparing Those Forces To Take Primary Responsibility For Security.** Already more than 35 Iraqi battalions have assumed control of their own areas of responsibility – including nearly half of Baghdad province and sectors of South-Central, Southeast, Western and North-Central Iraq. In the year ahead, the Coalition will continue handing more territory to Iraqi forces, with the goal of having the Iraqis control more territory than the Coalition by the end of 2006.

- **As Iraqis Stand Up, American Forces Will Stand Down.** With more Iraqi Security Forces demonstrating the capabilities needed to achieve victory, American commanders have determined that combat forces can decrease from 17 to 15 brigades by the spring of 2006. This adjustment will result in a net decrease of several thousand troops below the pre-election baseline of 138,000. This comes in addition to the reduction of about 20,000 troops in Iraq largely to assist with election security. If Iraqis continue to make security and political progress, the United States expects to discuss with Iraq's new government further possible adjustments. All the President's decisions will be based upon conditions on the ground – not artificial timetables set by politicians in Washington.

#### **The Economic Component Of Victory In Iraq:**

**The Coalition Will Continue To Help Iraqis Rebuild Their Infrastructure And Economy.** Iraq's economy faces real challenges but the Coalition and Iraqi leaders have made significant progress in a number of areas. Iraq has a stable currency, an independent stock exchange, and an independent Central Bank. Iraqis have new investment laws welcoming foreign capital, tax and commercial laws encouraging private-sector growth, and a low-tariff trade regime opening the economy to the world. Unlike under Saddam Hussein, Iraq's new constitution guarantees protection of property rights.

- **Iraqi Leaders Are Also Making Tough Choices Necessary To Reform Their Economy.** Iraq is easing gasoline subsidies, which made fuel prices artificially low, creating incentives for black-market corruption and crime. Changing

these subsidies is a necessary step on the path to reform. Gasoline subsidies, along with other subsidies, consume over half of Iraq's annual operating budget – diverting critical resources from health, education, infrastructure, and security. Addressing these subsidies will allow Iraqi leaders to better provide for their people and build a modern economy.

- **One Of The Biggest Challenges Is Restoring The Country's Oil And Electric Power Infrastructure.** These sectors were devastated by decades of neglect – and since liberation, terrorists have targeted these areas for destruction. As a result, oil and power production are below pre-war levels. To help increase production, the Coalition is helping Iraqis better maintain their oil refineries, build oil supply and transportation capabilities, improve the capacity to generate power, and better protect their strategic infrastructure. Despite the challenges they face, seven in 10 Iraqis say their lives are going well, and nearly two-thirds expect things to improve – and their optimism is justified.

**In 2006, The International Community Must Do Its Part To Help Iraqis.** So far, other nations and international organizations have pledged more than \$13 billion in assistance but many have been slow to make good on their commitments. The President calls on all governments that have pledged assistance to follow through with their promises so Iraqis can rebuild their country and provide a better future for their children. The President also calls on all nations who froze Iraqi assets during the Saddam Hussein regime to return those assets to the free people of Iraq. Many of the world's smallest nations have been among the most generous. Last month, Slovakia joined the United States and Malta in writing off Iraqi debt completely. More nations should do the same, so Iraq is not held back by the crushing burden of debt accumulated by Saddam Hussein's regime. International lending institutions are also stepping forward. Last month, the International Monetary Fund approved Iraq's request for a \$680 million loan to carry out economic reforms. The World Bank recently approved its first loan to Iraq in over 30 years.

#### **A Honest And Responsible Debate Here At Home**

**America Must Debate Its Differences Honestly.** There is a vigorous debate about the war in Iraq, and the President welcomes this debate. But this debate must be conducted responsibly when American troops are risking their lives overseas. There is a difference between honest critics who question the way the war is being prosecuted, and partisan critics who claim that we acted in Iraq because of oil, because of Israel, or because the American people were misled.

- **In A Time Of War, We Have A Responsibility To Show That Whatever Our Political Differences At Home, Our Nation Is United And Determined To Prevail.** We have a responsibility to the men and women in uniform who deserve to know that support will be with them in good days and bad. We will settle for nothing less than complete victory. Support for the mission in Iraq should not be a partisan matter. Some of our finest men and women have given their lives in freedom's cause, and we will not waver, or weaken, or back down from the cause they served.